Research Funding and Policy Branch
Research Division
Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research
GPO Box 9839
CANBERRA, ACT, 2601

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The Australian Academy of the Humanities welcomes the opportunity to contribute its ideas in response to the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research's Consultation Paper, *Meeting Australia's research workforce needs: A consultation paper to inform the development of the Australian Government's research workforce strategy*. The Academy commends the Government for addressing the key challenges and opportunities around the demand for, supply and quality of Higher Degree Research qualified individuals, the global competitiveness of Australia's research workforce, generic issues affecting research career structures and trajectories, and for developing and progressing a broad-based strategy for rejuvenating and expanding Australia's research workforce.

The Academy is one of Australia's four Learned Academies, established as an independent body to advance scholarship in the humanities in Australia, to promote understanding of the humanities in the Australian community, and to act as an advisory body to governments, industry, the media and the public on matters concerning the humanities.

Though the Academy comprises over 500 of the most influential and internationally celebrated humanities scholars, the majority of our fellowship and grant programs are aimed at facilitating the careers of early and mid-career researchers, in order to build and support capacity in the next generation of researchers. The Academy therefore has a strong interest in the research training needs and research workforce issues of humanities scholars in Australian universities, and of the humanities research workforce more broadly.

We acknowledge the contribution of the high-level Reference Group and its thematic sub-groups, and applaud the efforts the Department has made to consult widely, including at the disciplinary level and across career spectra – for while it is important that the Department maintains a thorough knowledge about Australia's research workforce in aggregate, the challenges and opportunities per sector, and at the institutional and disciplinary levels, will be unique.

The Academy would be very pleased to elaborate on any of the observations contained in this submission. Please direct your initial inquiries to the Academy's Executive Director, Dr Christina Parolin, via email to christina.parolin@humanities.org.au

Yours sincerely,

Professor Joseph Lo Bianco
President

THE AUSTRALIAN ACADEMY OF THE HUMANITIES

Submission in response to
Research Workforce Strategy Consultation Paper:
Meeting Australia's research workforce needs.

August 2010

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Australian Academy of the Humanities strongly supports the rationale behind the development of a robust, integrated Research Workforce Strategy. Overall, the Academy considers that the following issues are the most critical in terms of Australia's capacity to effectively resource, attract and retain its next generation of researchers:

Research Training Scheme
The Research Training Scheme requires urgent review, particularly the high cost/ low cost funding differential. Dividing the entire research education enterprise into two categories – expensive and cheap – fails to recognise the significant variation in the actual cost of delivery within each of these categories. The arbitrary cost differential has marginalised research activity in designated low cost disciplines.

R&D Tax Arrangements
Whole forms of research in the humanities and creative arts are explicitly ineligible as core activity under Australia's current R&D tax arrangements. This limits industry's uptake of, and engagement, with these highly successful fields and constitutes an impediment to the involvement of world-class research activity in the national innovation system.

Pathways to Research Training
A whole of sector review of pathways into research training for both domestic and international research students is required: addressing the decline in Honours enrolments; removal of the disincentives for part-time students and barriers to international student participation; and the wholly inadequate postgraduate stipend.

Review of the PhD
The Australian PhD, as currently structured, is not providing adequate methodological training nor equipping students with transferable generic skills. It requires urgent review, with particular consideration to the inclusion of a high-level coursework component and in light of international directions and trends in research training.

Fragility of Core Disciplines
The Academy has identified additional areas of critical need, including the national deficit in language capability, which we regard as Australia's great unrecognised skills shortage – and one directly relevant to our competitiveness, security, prosperity and social harmony in an increasingly global environment.

Advancing Interdisciplinary Research
Strategic investment in interdisciplinary training for researchers is crucial. The global direction is to bring all disciplinary perspectives to the table to find solutions to complex problems yet this is an area currently under-developed in Australia. Part of our future belongs to the development of research clusters, the fostering of emergent disciplines or areas of study and cross-sectoral research collaboration. Policy makers need to be mindful of the potential of instruments such as ERA to discourage universities from supporting interdisciplinary research.

Research Workforce Planning
Career path planning is urgently required, particularly at the point of immediate post PhD completion where few incentives exist to establish a research career. The increasing casualisation of the academic workforce remains a serious impediment to the attractiveness of a career in the sector.

The Academy offers the following response to specific questions raised in the Consultation Paper from the perspective of the humanities disciplines, but recognise that our comments may be applicable to other disciplines, and indeed, at times, relevant across the disciplinary spectrum.

SECTION ONE: EMPLOYER DEMAND

Q1: Do the issues identified adequately capture the challenges facing Australia in adapting to the changing nature of employer demand and meeting its innovation aspirations over the next decade? If not, what other challenges should be considered?

The humanities research workforce is diffuse. According to Graduate Careers Australia, two-thirds of humanities HDR graduates proceed to destinations other than universities. Humanities researchers have a pivotal role to play in the creative industries, in the public sector, in industry – including cultural institutions – as well as within the higher education sector. Many employers would be adversely affected were the quality and quantity of humanities HDR graduates to suffer.

The issues identified in the Paper capture the broad challenges Australia faces in meeting employer demand and its innovation aspirations. We offer the following observations on specific challenges for the humanities:

- **One of the most serious challenges, which hampers our ability to harness Australia's strengths in the humanities and creative arts, exists in the current R&D tax regime.** These disciplines provide the content and technical know-how that fuel the creative industries and yet are explicitly ineligible as core activity under Australia's current R&D tax arrangements. It is widely held that the current rates of private sector R&D investment in Australia are lamentably low, yet this continued arbitrary exclusion limits industry's uptake of and engagement with these highly successful fields, constituting an impediment to the involvement of this world-class research activity in the national innovation system. The Academy has made two detailed submissions to Treasury on this issue.[1]

- Though the Government is working towards shifting the balance towards more industry-based and private sector-financed R&D, this demand will take time to shift. **Universities will continue to play a major role both as a chief employer of research-trained graduates, and in producing a more highly skilled future research workforce.** Academic workforce issues must be addressed in the interim – by providing an increase in the number of postdoctoral fellowships or other bridging positions to both cater for the increased demand (and supply) of the academic workforce and to encourage and facilitate transition to (and from) industry and other employment sectors.

- The Academy's research supports the findings of other studies which suggest projected shortfalls in personnel and skills across the academic workforce. The current age structure of this cohort means that **Australia will soon face a critical shortage of academics across most disciplines due to staff retirements over the next decade**.

- The Academy agrees with the Paper that new undergraduate student targets compound these challenges now, with our research showing the **incapacity of the current academic workforce to absorb increased enrolments**.

[1] Australian Academy of the Humanities, *Submission in Response to the Treasury's Consultation Paper* : *The New Research and Development Tax Incentive* (2009); Australian Academy of the Humanities, *Response to the Exposure Draft Legislation and Explanatory Materials for the New Research and Development Tax Incentive* (2010).

- The Academy supports initiatives to build and consolidate industry links, and identify incentives for employers to engage researchers and for researchers to develop industry-relevant skills and experience. Strategic investment from government, institutions and employers to bring parties together, dispel myths, and to engage in dialogue will pay dividends in the longer term. It is vital that such investment be directed across the full range of disciplines recognising the diverse employment destinations for HDRs. **The Strategy needs to recognise that industry is not one-size-fits all.** Current programs to support and enable industry engagement such as the Enterprise Connect Research in Business Program, while providing designated support for the creative industries, do not cater to the wider humanities.

- Paucity of data remains a key challenge in understanding and adapting to employer demand. There have been large-scale government-funded surveys of the research sector in very recent years,[2] yet the focus on science and technology (and the explicit exclusion of the humanities, social sciences and arts) in these mapping exercises means that **Australia lacks a complete account of research across the academic disciplines.** However, understanding the research workforce in aggregate, even by sector, is only part of the picture. There is a need for more disciplinary specific analyses.

Q2: Do the issues identified adequately capture the opportunities available to Australia to better respond to the changing nature of employer demand in Australia and meet national innovation aspirations? If not, what other opportunities should be considered?

The Paper adequately summarises the available and foreseeable opportunities including facilitating employer access to research skills; the strengthening of existing workforce renewal strategies, including the need to retain staff exiting the sector; and the removal of existing impediments to international researchers.

The Academy considers that there are other opportunities yet to be sufficiently articulated and developed including:

- **Strategic investment in interdisciplinary training for researchers is not currently well developed in Australia.** Part of our future belongs to the development of research clusters and the fostering of emergent disciplines or areas of study and cross-sectoral research linkages. The global direction is to bring all disciplinary perspectives to the table to find solutions to problems such as water management, urban sustainability and climate change. The Academy hastens to add that solid disciplinary training is vital in order for researchers to engage in multi-disciplinary teams. However, the Academy suggests that international best practice be reviewed to explore the means to effectively facilitate such work (the German example in instructive here). We also direct the Department to current work in Australia in this regard, including a project by the Australian Council of Learned Academies (ACoLA) 'Making Interdisciplinary Research Work – Achieving a Sustainable Australia'.

- **Policy makers need to be mindful of the potential of instruments such as ERA to discourage universities from supporting interdisciplinary research.** The feedback the Academy has received from researchers is that ERA cluster processes and the reliance on Field of Research (FoR) classifications are potentially counterproductive to broader interdisciplinary programs of activity.

[2] Notably *Mapping Australia's Science and Innovation System* (2003), and the Productivity Commission's review *Public Support for Science and Innovation* (2006).

- **There needs to be a greater recognition of the role of culture in innovation.** Innovation is a process, not an object or end-point. The innovation literature increasingly emphasises the importance of leadership, management, marketing, creativity, organisation, design and social and cultural factors. These factors may lead to innovation in their own right, and frequently contribute to successful innovation outcomes in conjunction with research contributions from across the disciplines. While there is now broad acceptance of the role of non-technical factors in the innovation process, the acceptance is not currently reflected adequately in the operations and procedures of the institutions and mechanisms through which Australia supports innovation, including its R&D tax arrangements and research training arrangements.

SECTION TWO: SUPPLY OF RESEARCHERS

Q3: Do the issues identified adequately capture the challenges facing Australia in delivering required levels of research skills to its workforce over the next decade? If not, what other challenges should be considered?

The Academy has genuine concerns about Australia's capacity to effectively resource, attract and retain its next generation of researchers.

The Academy believes that structural biases, disincentives and inequities in the current system have led to the marginalisation and under-funding of humanities research, with flow-on consequences for research capability and renewal.

- Of particular concern for the humanities is **the RTS funding formula which relies on a low-cost/high-cost differential that disadvantages the humanities**. Dividing the entire research education enterprise in Australia into two categories – expensive and cheap – fails to have regard to the fact that there is significant variation in the actual cost of delivery (supervision, resources, infrastructure, etc.) within each of these categories. This is an exceedingly blunt instrument that has little relationship to the actual costs incurred within the research training activities it is designed to fund. The formula privileges completing doctorates, which are funded at twice the rate of corresponding masters level completions, and completions within designated 'high-cost' disciplines. Moreover the high proportion of the total formula for funding of research education that is attached to completion – as opposed to funding directly for cost of provision – also disadvantages humanities HDR students. The Academy made a cogent and comprehensive case for a review of the RTS, contained in its submission to the House of Representatives Inquiry into Research Training and Research Workforce Issues in Australia.[3]

There is a laudable focus on research training in the Consultation Paper – this is an area requiring urgent attention. **The Academy believes that we need a whole of sector review of pathways into research training for domestic as well as international students.**

- While there are now proliferating pathways into a PhD, there is a need to address the decline in Honours enrolments caused in part because future research career paths are not well defined. **The Academy considers that the Consultation Paper does not adequately address the problems of different degree pathways leading to a PhD, especially Honours.** Honours functions as part capstone to undergraduate and part entrée to postgraduate training. The Academy recommends a thorough review of the efficacy of current Honours programs to provide adequate articulation to higher degree research training.

[3] Australian Academy of the Humanities, *Submission to the Inquiry into Research Training and Research Workforce Issues in Australia* (2008).

- **The Academy is concerned that the research training system in Australia, as currently structured, is not providing adequate methodological training.** Essentially, the Australian system is flawed: ours is a seven year system traditionally comprising a three year bachelor degree, and one year Honours component. As it stands, our system is uncompetitive, already being at least one year short (Bologna is eight years, the US system even longer). There is an inherent problem with the three-year PhD, which is not long enough to make up for a shortfall in preliminary training, and this is compounded by the fact that the PhD lacks a high-level coursework training component. The issue of students needing better generic skills is raised but not really addressed in the recommendations. For various historical reasons, our system has focused on producing theses, not researchers.

- The proposal to increase the number of Australian Postgraduate Awards (APA) is very welcome. However, **a doubling of numbers of APAs alone, without consideration of other measures to address research training support and better articulation of career pathways, will not achieve the desired outcome**.

- **The Academy strongly supports the proposed increase in the APA stipend but cautions that an increase of 10% from an already low level may not be a sufficient incentive** for attracting prospective students, and, moreover, will continue to make it hard for students currently in the system to stay the distance.

- **The Academy vigorously supports the alignment of RTS funding and stipend at four years, which will allow for more broad-reaching and methodologically rigorous HDR training.** The increase in the length of scholarship, to align with the duration of candidature under the RTS, is a significant starting point for systemic change, but we need a review of the structure of the PhD itself, especially the need to include a coursework component (see above).

- Currently, domestic student places have plateaued; the growth in the system is at the international level. Hence we **strongly support the Government's policy-level mechanisms to remove impediments to the participation of international students**, by expanding the International Postgraduate Research Scholarship (IPRS) scheme, opening up the APA to IPRS candidates, and resolution of visa issues to support students and researchers to study and conduct research in Australia.

- The Academy recommends that the Government also **review the current impediments to the participation of part-time HDR students** (such as tax disincentives) to encourage the increased participation in HDR programs of such students who will be a critical cohort in the Government's research workforce aims.

- **A holistic approach is needed to the issue of attrition**. While universities have a key role to play in addressing issues of attrition – including student support and incentives and recognition (perhaps in promotional opportunities) for supervisors who best mentor HDRs to completion – this is not just an institutional responsibility. High attrition needs to be understood in a fully rounded, contextual sense – financial disincentives to continuing, family-friendly work environments, research cultures, time-poor senior researchers/ supervisors.

Q4: Do the issues identified adequately capture the opportunities available to Australia to enhance its supply of research skills over the next decade? If not, what other opportunities should be considered?

The Consultation Paper acknowledges the uneven capacity of Australia's research training system to deliver the quantity and the quality of skills required to meet future demand both in the aggregate and in individual disciplines.

- Although the Consultation Paper singles out the "critical enabling sciences and core disciplines such as earth sciences" (p. 23), there are additional areas of critical need such as foreign languages. **The Academy believes that the national deficit in language capability is Australia's great unrecognised skills shortage** – and the one most directly relevant to our competitiveness, security, prosperity and social harmony in an increasingly global environment. The Academy is currently reviewing data from its research project into the current state of the humanities, which points to the fragility of other disciplines in the humanities.

- **The proposal to "harness the contributions of currently under-represented groups", notably Indigenous researchers, will need to be thought through across a number of policy settings.** Our own very preliminary scoping research suggests that the current system is highly inflexible, with little reward for the high levels of outreach and community work which are integral to the research work of Indigenous scholars; that the Indigenous workforce profile is changing; that there is a high rate of burn-out of Indigenous academics due to demands from within their institutions and commitments to their communities as academics and representatives; that humanities disciplines are losing Indigenous researchers to more lucratively funded research fields such as health; and that Indigenous knowledge systems are not adequately recognised in the higher education environment.

- **It is imperative that consistent funding be available for international research, and to facilitate and build the skills requirements for collaborative and interdisciplinary work.** International linkages are a form of capacity building which will increase the size and ambitions of research projects and assist in generating industry links and attracting additional resources. They are also vital to enable Australian researchers to access the 97% of the world's knowledge produced offshore.

- **Structural impediments to collaboration need to be resolved.** Some of these are generic impediments (such as the non-alignment of funding regimes) which affect researchers across the spectrum, but in other ways these are impediments felt wholly or acutely by the humanities. In Australia, the lion's share of government-funded programs seeding and supporting international collaborative research are either unavailable to humanities scholars altogether, or have empirically very low rates of support for humanities collaborative research where these disciplines are technically eligible. Funding for the research infrastructure needs for the humanities lags well behind international activity in the UK, Europe, and USA.

SECTION THREE – CAREER PATHS

Q5: Do the issues identified adequately capture the challenges facing Australia in providing productive and viable career paths to its researchers over the next decade and promoting them adequately? If not, what other challenges should be considered?

The challenges to providing viable career paths have, broadly and generically, been identified in the Consultation Paper. The lack of availability of clear and viable career paths for researchers is also a major impediment to both the attraction and retention of higher degree students. The Academy believes that succession planning is needed from the research workforce roots right through the professional development of HDRs, ECRs and leadership capacity building of mid-career academics.

Attention to industrial issues such as adequate levels of remuneration across the career spectrum will also be crucial if higher numbers of researchers are to be enticed and if research is to be presented as a attractive career option. **On the identified need to encourage "greater flexibility, mobility and adaptability in the research workforce" the Academy cautions**

that there is a need to strike a balance between mobility and stability. As an ECR respondent to the Academy's *Humanities in Australia Today* survey put it:

> Young scholars need time to shake off the shackles of the PhD, think adventurously, and explore other areas of interest, and this can best be done with the only security that truly matters not only to individual but also to the future stability of our profession, that of having a 'real' job teaching and researching, rather than a series of brief and insecure fellowships.

One area the Academy considers has not been given sufficient attention in the Consultation Paper is the casualisation of the academic workforce. This issue is of critical concern for the humanities sector. **In the higher education sector the trend to casualisation has not been strategic and far-sighted.** We make three observations on this point.

- One of the key findings of DASSH's Bachelor of Arts (BA) scoping study was that there has been a "decline in numbers of full-time staff, increasing casualisation and implications for renewal".[4] Their study found that there were 699 fewer FTE academic staff teaching on BA degrees in 2006 than five years prior. This trend is supported by research conducted by the Academy's *Humanities in Australia Today* research project, and by studies such as Coates et al, affirming that in the higher education sector **there has been an increasing reliance on casual and contract staff to fill the gaps and keep the system ticking along.**[5] This is not a sustainable, long-term solution.

- The Consultation Paper characterises the increased casualisation across the research workforce as resulting from "strategic decisions on the part of employers in the face of a number of factors, including affordability, need and flexibility" (p.16). The impact of the increasing casualisation of academic labour has had serious consequences for career paths and prospects, professional development and the attractiveness of an academic career. **Sessional teachers and contract researchers are essentially excluded from access to structural forms of professional development.** Coates et al make a salient point that while the ABS, and many employers and employees might see casualisation as beneficial "this view does not match the debate on the subject within the university sector".[6]

- **The impact of casualisation on regional campuses has seen many institutions especially exposed to crises of sustainability,** in that regional areas generally do not have the same access to skilled casual tutors so that a program's existence can be very precarious if full-time equivalent (FTE) staffing is reduced. This poses significant challenges to the quality of research training provision and of research leadership.

Q6: Do the issues identified adequately capture the opportunities available to Australia to better support researchers at the different stages of their careers over the next decade? If not, what other opportunities should be considered?

The Academy agrees with opportunities identified in the Consultation Paper and particularly supports a coordinated and coherent approach to workforce planning and development. We agree that Australia's research diaspora present potential for engagement and recognition, and supports schemes to encourage re-entry of people into the research workforce after a period of time in the public/ private sector.

[4] Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities. (2008) *BA Scoping Project*. Summary reports available from http://www.dassh.edu.au/basp/summary
[5] Coates, H., Dobson, I., Goedegburre, L., and Meek, L. (2009) 'Australia's Casual Approach to its Academic Teaching Workforce', *People and Place* 17(4): 47-54.
[6] Coates, et al., p. 49.

The Academy considers that serious attention must be paid to:

- **The crucial gap in the pathway at the point of PhD completion**: Government policy has been to increase PhD places, fund mid-career high achievers through Future Fellowships, and stars through Australian Laureate Fellowships. Current post-doctoral fellowships are simply not an adequate means to keep people in the system – they are in fact, a disincentive to a research career. More emphasis must be given at this stage on establishing a career – rather than the current approach which seems imbedded in a 'separating the wheat from the chaff'/ 'survival of the fittest' mentality.

- **The need for researchers at the early stages of their career to be supported in developing networks and establishing collaborations**, and having access to strategic knowledge. This is not simply about dollars to better support ECRs, but is also about providing incentives and opportunities for mentoring and professional development.

- **The recognition of the indispensible role of networks, in building careers and liberating individual researchers from institutional contexts.** Individual connections are not an antidote to the loss of the highly successful ARC Research Networks.